

35. *Townsend's Field-notes on Californian Zoology.*

[Field-notes on the Mammals, Birds, and Reptiles of Northern California. By Charles H. Townsend, Pr. U.S. N. M. 1887, p. 159.]

This paper contains a series of field-notes on the birds of Northern California by a well-known explorer. About 260 species are known from California north of the 40th parallel, of which more than 200 were met with by Mr. Townsend during his travels in 1883-5, in connexion with the U.S. Commission on Fish and Fisheries in California.

XII.—*Letters, Extracts, Notices, &c.*

We have received the following letters addressed to the Editors of 'The Ibis':—

Northrepps Hall, Norwich,
Nov. 16, 1887.

SIRS,—The Norwich Museum has lately obtained through the good offices of Professor Menzbier a specimen of *Scops brucei* (Hume), collected in Turkestan by the late Dr. Severtzoff at Utch-Kurgan, a town near the river Syr-Daria.

Professor Menzbier informs me that the specimen sent by him is of the same species as that for which Dr. Cabanis proposed the specific name of "*obsoletus*" in the Journ. für Orn. for 1875, p. 126, founded on two specimens in the Berlin Museum, one from Bokhara, and the other from Syria.

Mr. Hume's specific name of "*brucei*" having been published in November 1872, has priority.

Mr. Charles Cross, who resides on the island of Negros, in the Philippine group, has lately presented me with some birds collected by him on that island, amongst which is an adult skin of *Polioætus ichthyaëtus* (Horsf.), a species which I believe has not been hitherto recorded from the Philippine Islands.

This specimen, which has been placed in the Norwich Museum, was killed near a river on the 6th January, and its crop contained fish.

I am &c.,

J. H. GURNEY.

Ootacamund,
Oct. 29, 1887.

SIRS,—I had hoped to have been able to send you papers on the birds I collected on the Anamullai Hills and in Travancore, but a press of work has prevented my doing so; and as I have now to go to Singapore with as little delay as possible to take up my appointment as Curator and Librarian of the Raffles Museum, I may not have the time to finish the papers. I would wish, however, to put on record a few facts about the birds which I collected.

I have to add two species to Mr. Bourdillon's list of Travancore birds, viz., *Alseonax muthei*, Layard, of which I obtained four males, and *Zosterops ceylonensis*, Holdsworth, of which I obtained six specimens. I also got four specimens of *Callene albiventris*, Fairbank, and numerous specimens of *Trochalopteron meridionale*, Blanford, and *Alcippe bourdilloni*, Hume. All these birds were obtained late in December and early in January, on the Chimpani Hills dividing Travancore Territory from the Tinnevely District.

Mr. T. Fulton Bourdillon has lately sent me a specimen of *Batrachostomus moniliger*, Layard, and one of *Lyncornis bourdilloni*, Hume. Of this latter he says, writing from "Camp Konegur":—

"This bird seems to be local, but not uncommon where it does occur, for I have seen one or two every night for the last two or three weeks since I have been here. They come out, however, very late; just as the last tinge of colour is fading out of the sky, one may see one or two of these birds sailing over the fields, seldom flapping their wings, but quartering the ground like a Harrier. They do not remain in one place, but travel about a great deal, but seem to return to the same neighbourhood night after night, unless one is shot, when they all disappear for four or five days.

"As a rule they fly slow, at about the same pace as a Harrier, except when moving from one place to another, when they go at a great pace, striking the air with vigorous wings."

The only novelty as to locality that I have to record from the Anamullai Hills is *Pycnonotus xantholemus*, Jerdon. I

obtained one specimen, the only one I saw during my stay of nearly two weeks on these hills; I was attracted to it by its peculiar note, and I was within five or six yards of it in dense bramble scrub before I saw it. I fortunately had my air-cane in my hand, and secured it. (I may remark *en passant* that a No. 1 air-cane made to carry shot is the finest collecting-gun in existence; with one tenth of an ounce of No. 12 shot it will bring down a Thrush at 20 yards, and at even 5 or 6 yards distance a small bird like a Wren Warbler may be killed that will make a perfect specimen.) I sent my collector on two occasions to the Anamullais specially to try and collect more specimens of this bird; but he failed to get any, so the bird must be rare so far south and west. Dr. Jerdon's specimens were collected in the Eastern Ghats near Nellore, a little to the north of 14° of N. latitude; my specimen was obtained about as far north of 10° of N. latitude, and considerably to the west—in fact nearer to the Western than the Eastern Ghats. My specimen was obtained at 4020 feet elevation.

Mr. Sharpe has catalogued one specimen of this *Pycnonotus* (Cat. of B. Brit. Mus. vol. vi. p. 146) from "Madras." This locality is as valuable as the locality "India," annexed to many specimens.

Mr. Sharpe's description is evidently taken from a very faded specimen, and hardly gives a fair idea of what the bird is really like.

In conclusion, I may say that I have complete lists of all the birds I have collected and certainly identified from the Anamullai Hills, Travancore, and the Nilgiri Hills, and if you think these would be of interest I shall be glad to send them to you; but they are only lists, with occasionally a few short remarks.

Yours truly,

W. DAVISON.

P.S.—I have forgotten to mention that I found *Phylloscopus magnirostris*, Blyth, very common on the Travancore Hills, quite the most common of the *Phylloscopi*, not except-

ing *P. viridanus*, which I have usually, in Southern India, found the most common species, except on the plateau of the Nilgiri Hills, where from the end of December to the end of March *P. affinis*, Tick., literally swarms about the fallow land and adjoining scrub. I obtained nineteen specimens of *P. magnirostris*, Blyth, on the Travancore Hills, and could easily have collected fifty specimens during the short time I was there.

SIRS,—I am interested and perplexed at the same time by Mr. Ridgway's letter on the breeding-plumage of *Podiceps occidentalis*, Lawr. Mr. Ridgway states truly that the breeding-plumage of *P. occidentalis* is described in the 'Water-Birds of North America' (ii. p. 422). But that description does not comprise the words printed in italics in his letter to you—"from numerous specimens obtained on the breeding-grounds, together with their eggs and young." I had looked through the account in the 'Water-Birds' carefully. I had noticed that while the date of capture of the adult winter specimen described is given, there is no such note on the specimen described as being in breeding-plumage. Prof. Baird, in his 'Birds,' p. 894, states that at that time its breeding-plumage was unknown, and anticipates that in its nuptial attire it will make a grand display. This anticipation, it seems, has been disappointed. I believe, though I may be in error, that Mr. Donald Gunn visited Shoal Lake before Prof. Baird wrote. None of the dated specimens given in the 'Survey' were captured during the breeding-season. My specimen was obtained in Vancouver's Island by Mr. R. Brown, who worked then with Mr. Hepburn, and Mr. Brown simply gives the name without any note in his catalogue of Vancouver Island Birds (Ibis, 1862, p. 427). Under the circumstances, and especially considering that the publication in the 'Water-Birds' in 1884 seems to have been the first published description of the breeding-plumage of *P. occidentalis*, albeit, as Mr. Ridgway states, "long known to American ornithologists," I think it is to be regretted that the authors of the 'Water-Birds' did not more dis-

tinely express the fact and give more details. The question now remains, What is my Vancouver Island bird, if not, as supposed by Mr. Brown, *P. occidentalis*? I shall be very glad, if it be wished, to send the specimen for inspection by our brothers across the Atlantic.

Yours truly,

H. B. TRISTRAM.

29th Nov., 1887.

3 Kensington Gardens Square,
London, W.

SIRS,—I have pleasure in stating that an example of the Isabelline Wheatear (*Saxicola isabellina*) was shot at Aigle Gill, near Allonby, Cumberland, on the 11th of November, 1887.

The bird was first observed on that day by Messrs. Thomas and Richard Mann, tenants of Aigle Gill farm. The weather was fine but dull, with a slight wind from the north. The bird made its appearance in a field which Messrs. Mann were sowing with corn, and was quite alone. It perched upon clods of earth after the habit of *S. ænanthe*, but appeared to be less lively in its movements than that species. It was unsuspicious of danger and was easily approached. Having had a visit from Mr. Senhouse and myself only six days earlier, when I begged my friends to continue to search for doubtful Wheatears, and struck by the light colour of this late bird, Messrs. Mann decided to shoot it for me. It was therefore shot by Mr. Thomas Mann, and posted to me the same day.

I received the bird the following day in fine condition, and took it to Mr. Howard Saunders, who kindly pointed out to me its identity with specimens of *S. isabellina* in his possession. The bird was also examined in the flesh by Mr. Sharpe, but especially by Mr. Seebohm, who compared it in my presence with his extensive series of Saxicolinæ. Mr. Harting saw the specimen before skinning, so did Mr. G. E. Lodge, who made a coloured sketch of it. The bird was also exhibited on my behalf by Mr. Howard Saunders, at a meeting of the Zoological Society of London on Dec. 6th.

It proved upon dissection to be a female, and the retention of some delicate bars upon the lower breast seems to indicate that it is a bird of the year. The irides were dark hazel, legs and bill black. Total length 6·5 in., wing $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. The stomach was empty.

The Isabelline Wheatear is most readily distinguished from *Saxicola œnanthe* by its white under wing-coverts and by the greater extent of the black upon the rectrices.

The Isabelline Wheatear is new to Western Europe. Its range eastward and southward is extensive, including Somaliland and Nubia, Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and the N.W. Provinces of India; in Russia, Mr. Seebold received eggs of this Chat from Sarepta; he has also two skins from Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. It visits the region of Lake Baikal on migration, breeds commonly in Daüria, and was obtained by Père David in the neighbourhood of Pekin. It has been recorded from Madagascar.

Yours &c.,

H. A. MACPHERSON.

The Turati Collection.—The collection of birds formed by the late Count Ercole Turati is now in the Museo Civico of Milan, where it occupies the uppermost story, and is not very conveniently lodged. It contains 20,618 specimens, nearly the whole of which are mounted. Amongst them are the whole of the Malherbe collection of Picidæ and the Verreaux collection of Trochilidæ, also examples of such rarities as *Nestor productus*, *Serresius galeatus*, *Bourcieria traviesi*, and *Alca impennis*. Although the specimens are in excellent order, much more space is required for their proper exhibition, and we accordingly learn with pleasure that the Milanese authorities contemplate the erection of a new building for the Museo Civico in another part of the Public Garden.

The Breeding-habits of Flamingoes.—Mr. H. A. Blake, late Governor of the Bahamas, has contributed to the December number of the ‘Nineteenth Century’ a very in-

teresting account of his visit to a breeding-place of the North-American Flamingo (*Phœnicopterus ruber*) on the Island of Abaco, Bahamas. Mr. Blake is not aware that the vexed question of the mode in which the Flamingo sits upon its eggs has already been settled by Mr. A. Chapman (see *Ibis*, 1884, p. 88); but his observations are of none the less interest as confirming those made on our European species. Mr. Blake visited the Flamingo-colony on Abaco on the 7th of June, and after describing his preliminary adventures, continues as follows:—"At length, having crawled under the roots of the dwarf mangroves that cover the slob like a network of croquet-hoops, we found ourselves at the edge of the marl, and within one hundred and fifty yards of the birds, who were still undisturbed. Here, with my glasses, I could see every feather, note the colour of the eyes, and watch every movement. There were, we calculated, between seven hundred and a thousand birds, and a continuous low goose-like cackling was kept up. Never did I see a more beautiful mass of colour.

"The male birds had now all got together, standing about five feet high, and with necks extended and heads erect were evidently watching events, preserving in the meantime a masterly inactivity. Now and again one would stretch out his great black and scarlet wings, but the general effect was the most exquisite shade of pink, as the feathers of the breast and back are much lighter than those of the wings.

"The hens sat on the nests, and some were sitting down in the muddy lagoon. I watched them carefully for nearly an hour, and looked at every nest to see if the legs were extended along the side. In no case did I see a leg. I saw the birds go on to the nests and sit down. I saw them get up, and step down from the nests. In every instance the legs were folded under the bird in the usual manner. In my opinion my observation settles the point as to the mode of sitting; for even if, as I had been assured, the birds sit both ways, it is improbable that among the hundreds then sitting not one would have extended the legs. Remembering the great length of the Flamingo's legs, it is evident that on

a new nest, not more than eight inches high, the hen could not thus sit, nor would even the highest nest allow of the legs being extended while the bird sat upon it."

The B.M. Catalogue of Birds.—The 12th volume of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum' is now nearly ready for issue. It will contain the account of the Fringillidæ, and is by Mr. Sharpe, who will also prepare the next (13th) volume, which will be devoted to the Ploceidæ, Sturnidæ, Alaudidæ, and other smaller groups, and conclude the Oscines. Selater has undertaken the 14th volume, which will contain the Tyrannidæ, Cotingidæ, and all the other Oligomyodian families, and has nearly finished his MS. on this subject. Selater will also catalogue the Tracheophonæ, which will fill the 15th volume. We are glad to hear that Mr. Salvin has already commenced work on the Trochilidæ, of which our National Collection possesses the unrivalled series comprised in the Gould and Salvin-Godman collections. The Trochilidæ will make up the 16th volume.

Sale of a Great Auk's Egg.—At Mr. J. C. Stevens's Auction Rooms, in King Street, Covent Garden, on the 13th of December last, a large number of ornithologists assembled to witness the sale of an egg of the Great Auk. Before offering the lot, Mr. Stevens remarked that, in 1880, two eggs of this bird, both of which had been broken, were sold by him, and that they fetched 100 and 102 guineas respectively. Of the recorded eggs, he said, 25 were in eighteen public museums, and 41 in nineteen private collections—43 out of the 66 being in Great Britain. The first bid of 50 guineas was made by a well-known ornithologist, and this was followed by 60 guineas from Mr. L. Field, to whom the egg was eventually knocked down at 160 guineas. The egg is one of ten which were discovered by Professor Newton in a glass case in the upper gallery of the inmost room of the Museum of the College of Surgeons, in 1861; four of which were sold at Stevens's on July 11th, 1865, when this specimen (Lot 142) fetched thirty guineas.